

# The “rules of genealogical research”: Responding to Tanner’s “Genealogy Star” blog



An image from a post on familytree.com titled [“Long Lost Relatives from Across the Aisle”](#)

In late December James L. Tanner wrote, [on his “Genealogy Star” blogspot](#), about genealogical research in the age of the internet. He wrote that “fundamental rules of genealogical research” necessitate that every conclusion cites a record or document. He added that “genealogy is not something you just make up in your spare time. The whole idea is that [genealogy](#) is based on history.” I write this post not to disagree with him, but to the contrary, to agree with him with a doubt.

In the rest of Tanner’s post, he notes how the “popular part of genealogy has evolved into a copycat deluge” with content of “record hints” ignored or dismissed, adding that there is “no way to purge the system of the old inaccurate information” meaning that such inaccuracies are “copied as well as the accurate information.” He gives examples of the “Family Data Collection – Deaths” collection (which was “copied from copies”), the “Family Data Collection – Births” collection (similar to the other family data collection), and the “U.S. Social Security Applications and Claims Inde[x]s, 1936-2007” (which could be “accurate, but unless the person looking at the entry goes beyond this entry, there is no way to know if the information is useful”) on Ancestry.com. He ends his post by saying the following to the reader:

*These are examples of the need to look carefully at the sources and to avoid copying copies. Without a general community-wide awareness of this need, we will keep getting copies of copies and preserving inaccurate information. Part of the blame for this situation lies with the individuals, but more lies with the large online companies who think they have “protected themselves” from criticism by explaining the traps but still promote the traps at the same time.*

Before moving on, I'd like to respond to the above recommendations and comments. I agree that it is easy to preserve inaccurate information. However, I think it is horrible that companies like [Ancestry](#) and sites like [Family Search](#) promote bad records with inaccurate sources. So, you have to be careful with genealogical research without a doubt.

Now, let me add my two cents and personal experience.

When I originally started doing genealogy, I was adding sources left and right, copying directly from family trees. These trees made it seem that the family on my mom's side descended from English royalty. I used similar information to “prove” the link from my mom's ancestors to a family of a similar name in England. However, this was all for naught: I only relied on family trees but little else. This meant I had to delete many individuals, deleting the “stinky” parts of my family tree on Ancestry.

Since then, my family tree on Ancestry has become a work in progress. I add and subtract information as needed, from time to time. I use “family trees” as a source but only when other sources are available. I recommend that one avoid other horrible sources like the “American Genealogical-Biographical Index (AGBI)”, “Millennium File”, “U.S. and International Marriage Records, 1560-1900” and “Web: Netherlands, GenealogieOnline Trees Index, 1000-2015” if possible. One of the collections looks like this:

## Source Citation for Family Data Collection - Births

**ANCESTRY RECORD**

**Family Data Collection - Births**

**CITATION DETAILS**

**VIEW RECORD**

**ASSOCIATED FACTS**

**MEDIA**

**NAME** Samuel Packard

**FATHER** George Packard

**MOTHER** Mary Wither

**BIRTH DATE** 17 September 1612

**CITY** Stonham Aspal

**COUNTY** Suffolk Co

**COUNTRY** England

**CLOSE**

**REMOVE**

And here is an example of what the “hints” (or the green leaf on profiles) look like on Ancestry:

**ALL HINTS** 9

**RECORDS** 5

**PHOTOS** 3

**STORIES** 0

**MEMBER TREES** 1

**SORT BY: MOST RECENT**


**FILTER BY NAME**

< 1 of 1 >

Within the last day

**Mills, Edward E. (1848-1918)**  
sibling of 2nd great-grandmother

**1860 United States Federal Census**  
Census & Voter Lists




**Name** Edward Mills  
**Birth** 1848 location  
**Residence** 1860 city, Warren, New York

**REVIEW**

**IGNORE**

**1850 United States Federal Census**  
Census & Voter Lists



**Name** Edward Mills  
**Birth** location 1847  
**Residence** 1850 city, Warren, New York

**REVIEW**

**IGNORE**

In this case, both hints are about the right person. However, I clicked “ignore” on both because the profile of his father already listed both censuses. I Just wrote “see 1850 census linked on his father’s page” (and the same for 1860), adding in the information from his father’s page. I did this because I don’t currently have an Ancestry.com subscription, but I have information attached to pages from the time I did have a subscription.

Anyway, more to the point of Tanner's post is a biography on Cyrus Winfield Packard. I originally was going to do the entry on Samuel Packard, which is one of the earliest entries on my family tree but I mostly cite my [Packed With Packards! blog](#) (which cites original sources), so it probably isn't a good example of good sourcing. So, I present the following biography (with certain identifying of the family tree information blacked out) as an example of something for other researchers to emulate.

Here is the top half of the page:



Census records and marriage records are the mainstay of this biography, whether federal or state censuses (only some states like Massachusetts have them). There is also a peppering of vital records of Massachusetts, Find A Grave, and posts from my *Packed with Packards!* blog about Cyrus. Now, census records and vital records can be found on ancestry, but if you don't want to pay for a subscription like yours truly then you can look up the same records on familysearch.org. You need to create an account now, but it is still relatively easy and a free-to-use service. This is an advantage of Family Search over Ancestry without a doubt.

Then there is the second half of the biography:

|      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 1800 | Residence  | 1800 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 25   | Marital Status Married. Since he is a farm hand, studies ordered he get Y. listed in this directory. <a href="https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-M358-4?i=102&amp;cc=102&amp;cat=102&amp;cc=102">https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-M358-4?i=102&amp;cc=102&amp;cat=102&amp;cc=102</a>                     | 1 source  |
| 1801 | Death of Mother Rachel Barlow Tibson (1823 - 1881)   | 30 January 1881 - Plainfield, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 21   |  |   |
| 1801 | Death of Wife Nellie Jane Mason (1801 - 1881)  | 24 Feb 1881 - Cummington, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 24   |  |   |
| 1801 | Property 122 acres from William L. Packard   | 24 Sep 1881 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America |
| 26   | Call her name "Married Packard" in this document. Does not mentioned, this is because he has NOT married her yet.  | 2 source  |
| 1802 | Marriage   | 23 Nov 1881 - Glen Falls, Warren, New York, USA                                     |
| 27   | Identity?  | 2 source  |
| 1801 | Birth of Son John Henry Packard (1882 - 1950)  | 18 Oct 1882 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, USA                      |
| 30   |  |   |
| 1804 | Birth of Daughter Margaret Alice Packard (1804 - 1971)   | 27 Jan 1884 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 34   |  |   |
| 1804 | Death of Brother Fred R. Packard (1801 - 1881)   | 12 Aug 1884 - Plainfield, Massachusetts, USA  |
| 36   |  |   |
| 1805 | Birth of Son Joseph Winfield Packard (1805 - 1910)   | 27 Jan 1885 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, United States                   |
| 38   |  |   |
| 1805 | Birth of Son Charles Edward Packard (1885 - 1900)  | 9 May 1887 - Cummington, Massachusetts  |
| 40   |  |   |
| 1805 | Death of Sister Mary W. Packard (1842 - 1887)  | 22 July 1887  |
| 42   |  |   |
| 1806 | Death of Brother William Tibson Packard (1830 - 1898)  | 11 Jan 1888 - Weston Falls, Canada  |
| 46   |  |   |
| 1808 | Birth of Daughter Marion Estelle Packard (1808 - 1901)   | 13 Feb 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 50   |  |   |
| 1801 | Sells 122 acres  | 1 Sep 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire Co., Massachusetts                               |
| 52   | Previously owned by Clark Packard, land bought by Henry Goodrich. Since address is his wife, same land mentioned in 1888 <a href="https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-M358-4?i=102&amp;cc=102&amp;cat=102&amp;cc=102">https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-M358-4?i=102&amp;cc=102&amp;cat=102&amp;cc=102</a> | 2 source  |
| 1800 | Buya other land  | 1888 - Springfield, Hampden, Massachusetts, USA                                     |
| 56   |  |   |
| 1801 | Birth of Son Robert  | 1881 - 1904   |
| 58   |  |   |
| 1801 | Sells land in Plainfield to Anna Downing   | 9 May 1881 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America  |
| 60   | Anna, of Berkshire, says Cyrus Tibson for this land previously owned by Henry C. Packard (Cyrus Tibson). One noted as Cyrus Tibson, agrees to sell.  | 2 source  |
| 1801 | Birth of Daughter Robert Nellie Packard (Engelbre) (1801 - 1961)   | 18 Jul 1882 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 64   |  |   |
| 1801 | Death of Wife Dorothy  | 1849 - 1895   |
| 66   |  |   |
| 1801 | Marriage   | 4 Aug 1888 - South, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                                   |
| 68   | <a href="https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-M358-4?i=102&amp;cc=102&amp;cat=102&amp;cc=102">https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-M358-4?i=102&amp;cc=102&amp;cat=102&amp;cc=102</a>  | 1 source  |
| 1800 | Death of Father William Henry Packard (1822 - 1890)  | 21 August 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                          |
| 70   |  |   |
| 1801 | Birth of Daughter Olive Martha Packard (1801 - 1901)   | 24 Oct 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 74   |  |   |
| 1801 | Birth of Son Herbert Wilson Packard (1888 - 1901)  | 6 Oct 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                              |
| 76   |  |   |
| 1801 | Birth of Daughter Rachel May Packard (1801 - 1911)   | 12 Apr 1890 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 80   |  |   |
| 1801 | A. H. Allen & Co. buys a part of land in Plainfield  | 28 Nov 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America |
| 82   | From Cyrus, Lida Chenoweth as his wife, \$300 dollars.   | 2 source  |
| 1800 | Residence  | 1800 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 84   | Marital Status Married. Relation to Head of House Head. Described as a carpenter.  | 2 source  |
| 1801 | Birth of Son Thomas Theodore Packard (1801 - 1971)   | 2 May 1891 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, United States                    |
| 86   |  |   |
| 1805 | Sells land he gained in 1885   | 8 Jun 1885 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America  |
| 88   | Clementine noted as his wife.  | 2 source  |
| 1807 | Birth of Son Harold "Harry" Cyrus Packard (1807 - 1971)  | 24 Aug 1887 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, United States                   |
| 90   |  |   |
| 1808 | Paid 1888 to the Plymouth Savings Bank for 275 acres   | 1 Jun 1888 - Cummington, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America  |
| 92   | Clementine noted as his wife.  | 2 source  |
| 1801 | Death of Son Joseph Winfield Packard (1801 - 1911)   | 9 Mar 1888 - Sioux City, Nebraska, United States                                    |
| 94   |  |   |
| 1801 | Residence  | 1801 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 96   | Marital Status Married. Relation to Head of House Head. Described as a general farmer.   | 2 source  |
| 1810 | Death of Brother Benjamin Franklin Packard (1810 - 1910)   | 1910  |
| 98   |  |   |
| 1801 | Gets a mortgage on farm land in Plainfield   | 31 Jan 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America |
| 100  | This land will later be released from this mortgage for which he has to pay 5% a year for 1046, 24 years after his death.  | 2 source  |
| 1800 | Residence  | 1800 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 102  | Marital Status Married. Relation to Head of House Head   | 2 source  |
| 1801 | Residence  | 1801 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 104  | Marital Status Married. Relation to Head of House Head. Described as a general farmer.   | 2 source  |
| 1821 | Sells mortgage paid off proceeds on his land   | 4 Aug 1882 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America  |
| 106  | This is the same land he was paying a mortgage for 5% a year, which he had acquired two years earlier.   | 2 source  |
| 1801 | Death of Wife Clementine Cheney (1874 - 1920)  | 27 Jan 1883 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                             |
| 108  |  |   |
| 1804 | Death of Brother Charles Packard (1804 - 1904)   | 1904 - Massachusetts, USA   |
| 110  |  |   |
| 1804 | Death of Brother Henry Clark Packard (1804 - 1904)   | 1904 - Massachusetts, USA   |
| 112  |  |   |
| 1804 | Death  | 1 Apr 1914 - Plainfield, Hampshire, Massachusetts, USA                              |
| 114  | Died of Chronic Myocarditis and General Anæmia. Comes from certified copy of record. Calls him a farmer, incorrectly and he is unknown. Daughter Oliver is informant. Lived on Governor St. in Plainfield.   | 2 source  |
| 1801 | His farm bought by his son, Theodore   | 1820 - Plainfield, Hampshire Co., Massachusetts                                     |
| 116  |  |   |
| 1804 | Discharge of land he owned   | 28 Oct 1888 - Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, United States of America |
| 118  |  |   |
| 1801 | Burial   | Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, USA                                    |
| 120  |  |   |
| 1801 | Old Fact   |   |

It continues in the same vein as the top half. I tried my best to source every bit of information I found. You may notice that I used photographs as a source. These come from a collection of Massachusetts Land Records at <http://www.masslandrecords.com> which you can search free and online. I was able to find a good many land records that way, which was immensely helpful to telling the story of Cyrus Winfield Packard. This blog is one of the first posts connecting my *Packed With Packards!* blog with this one.

I look forward to hearing your comments.

© 2018-2023 Burkely Hermann. All rights reserved.